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Atari Online News, Etc.
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->From the Editor's Keyboard "Saying it like it is!"  
"~~~~~"

I'd be remiss if I didn't mention how sad it was to mark the first anniversary this past week of the terrorist attacks in the United States. I watched very little of the tributes and memorial commentary of that tragic event. While I realize it's important to understand and remember those events, I could not bring myself to watch it again. It's hard to believe that it's been a year since that horrific day. The innocent lives that were lost. The cowardly deluded animals who did them. And the even more cowardly bastards who planned those acts of terror. The victims became heroic martyrs and the world became resolved to attempt to rid our world of terrorism. Hopefully, there can be something good come out of this tragedy, and soon. Unfortunately, I believe that things are going to get much worse before they get better. There are just too many places in the world that are like drought-infected forests waiting for that inevitable bolt of lightening to strike and start a wildfire. And for what? For religion, a place in the history books, power, oil, madness?

You want to know something? They are mad. And the people who believe in them and follow them are like lemmings. Rid the world of their causes and these madmen will fade into oblivion. Is it possible? I doubt it. But it would be nice if the rest of the world could help make it happen.  
Let's Roll!

Speaking of sanity striking the masses, the Greeks finally realized that their ban on electronic gaming had to be one of the most idiotic blunders of the day, and they are overturning this so-called law. Chalk one up for common sense prevailing over stupidity!

Until next time...

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KEYTAB 08 Available

KEYTAB 08 is released on 2002-09-01. It's a little system utility which offers routines for converting chars between charsets (i.e. Atari->Windows ANSI, ISO-8859-1 (ISO Latin1) -> Atari, etc.). KEYTAB is freeware incl.

utilities, the library for developers (Pure-C, GNU-C, Pure Pascal, GFA) and all sources.

There are three new charsets implemented: NeXT, IBM Codepage 437 and IBM Codepage 850. Furthermore are there new conversions: from any of the supported charsets chars and memory blocks can be converted to unicode.

In addition to the Conversions of 8-Bit-Charsets there are unicode-codings with variable length like UTF-8, UTF-7,5 and UTF-7 (UTF=Unix Transformation Format). With new implemented functions there are conversions between all charsets incl. the unicode-codings in any other charset - internally via the Atari charset or via unicode.

KEYTAB can be downloaded from <http://acspro.atari.org/>

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PEOPLE ARE TALKING  
compiled by Joe Mirando  
joe@atarinews.org

Hidi ho friends and neighbors. I'm afraid that there aren't a lot of posts on the UseNet this week. My sincerest hope is that is just a temporary thing... that folks are too busy with yard work or vacations to post in the NewsGroup, but let's face it... we represent an old platform that's no longer the height of technology.

I can remember wondering who the heck would buy an IBM compatible when machines like the ST and the Amiga provided so much more functionality for less money. Even the CPUs involved were mis-matched. Looking at a diagram of Intel's 386 chip compared to Motorola's 68000 was an interesting visual exercise. While Motorola's design was compact and well ordered, the 386 looked cobbled together to me, almost like a micro-hammer had been used to make forgotten pieces of circuitry fit. Now this isn't a scientific... or probably even accurate... observation, it's something that has stuck with me for years.

My boss is friends with one of the engineers that started Intel, and from everything I can gather, he's a good guy. It just seems to me that Intel got stuck with servicing a crude design and found that they had to keep it in order to maintain compatibility. That's not unlike Atari's situation with operating systems. While IBM had a slew of operating systems available... from its own to Microsoft's offerings, to Linux in the past decade, Atari users had only one option. True, there were variations and one or two options that never caught on, but TOS was really the only game in town because of the fact that the operating system was in ROM.

Ah yes, hindsight is 20/20, isn't it? Had the Tramiels had access to a time machine, would they have built hard drives into their early computers and left TOS on disk? Would they have made other changes in the way that video was handled? And if they did, would we have bought these machines? We could chase our tails all day long and not have any clear answers. What really matters is that these machines provided us

with utility at a good price, and opened a world filled with other users to us. How many of us have NOT made friends because of our computers? It's enough for me that these computers have done what I needed them to do. The bonus is the friendships I've made over almost 20 years that wouldn't have been possible had I not decided to spend my money wisely instead of on one of those monochrome DOS based machines.

On another subject, unless you live in a cave somewhere, you've been swamped with "memories of 9-11. I'm a bit disappointed in the media because of the way the first anniversary of the terrorist attack was handled. I don't know about anyone else, but I don't need the media reminding me every 20 minutes or so about what happened. The events of September 11, 2001 are burned in my mind, along with all of the rhetoric from both sides that followed.

I've tried very hard to avoid stating my personal opinions on the subject here in this column. I don't believe that this is the place for it. But I would like to say that I still feel that these were cowardly men committing cowardly acts. A martyr is one who is killed for his faith or beliefs, not one who takes his own life. That is simply suicide. Any fool can end his own life. What takes faith and strength not dying for your beliefs, but living for them. So I guess that these 'martyrs' down-graded themselves and up-graded their victims, didn't they?

There. That's all I'm going to say about the subject.

Well, let's get to the news, hints, tips, and info available from the UseNet.

From the comp.sys.atari.st NewsGroup  
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Raoul Teulings asks about a problem he had with E-Tool:

"Just today I found the time to get into my problem with EMailer after using E-Tool. I do not know if there's a connection and I am not implying that but I found a corrupted GRPLIST.TXT file which caused all the problems...

I switched it with the backed-up one and now everything is working like it should be...

I am only curious how the file got corrupted: a lot of characters just got in place of the regular addresses...It looks like if something got imported by this list..."

Kenneth Medin tells Raoul:

"I have seen strange things happening with Popwatch (another mail client) when it tries to retrieve the header (+ 1 line of body?) of some spam mail I get now and then.

These mails have only one single body line but is something like 20 000 characters long! Because some internal buffer in Popwatch gets overflowed it puts in garbled parts of other (Popwatch) files in the retrieved message.

When this happens Magic complains about "Memory violation" but strangely Popwatch itself is not killed but another app, Taskbar, gets terminated."

Mat Augier asks about finding MIDI files on the 'net:

"Does anyone know of a site that holds some old demo music in Midi format? I'm recreating some old stuff for fun and just want a bit of basic sound."

Edward Baiz tells Mat:

"Have you tried Tim's Atari Midi site:

<http://tamw.atari-users.net/timidi.htm>

If it is not there, I am sure Tim can help you."

Edward Baiz now asks:

"I have a swf video-sound file. Is there any Atari program that will play this file? Is there a program that will convert it to a form that Aniplay can play? I even tried to play it on my wife's Pentium II with no luck."

Lonny Pursell tells Edward:

"I think those are Flash files? Someone sent me one and it played when I dropped it on the IE window on my Mac."

Joshua Kaijankoski adds:

"They are flash files and there is no Atari that will play them. You need to download Flash on a PC/Mac and then play the files on your browser. Go to <http://www.macromedia.com>"

Mike Freeman adds his own thoughts and knowledge to the mix:

"I work with SWF files all the time. It isn't a video format, actually. It is an interactive computer animation format called "Shockwave Flash". The way it works, I believe (I may be wrong), is that it has a script that defines for the computer exactly what to do when, as well as a set of data to draw from (i.e. images, sounds, etc.). For instance, instead of running a video with a set size and ratio, it will tell the computer, "put this set of letters on the screen at this point size relative to the total screen size, perform a mathematical algorithm for causing the individual letters to loop around the screen 'follow-the-leader' fashion, for x amount of time, then fade in an image behind it half-way through." It is an extremely CPU intensive. But when you have a good enough system to run it, it will create very slick animations, including making text and images fly around the screen with constantly changing aspect ratios, fades, etc. and the animation itself is resolution independent, so if you change the size of the animation, everything

grows bigger (i.e. font sizes, etc), keeping the same proportions as before, without getting "Pixelly" (except for bitmap images, which still must get pixelly when enlarged). It also allows interaction, in that you can assign an animated action to an input from mouse, specific key-presses, etc. It also has support for Javascript. They have games out on the 'net written in Flash (.swf) that are exactly the same, pixel-for-pixel, sound-for-sound, as the original arcade or console versions that run on any machine that support .swf files. Tons of web pages use them instead of animated .gif files because of the much smoother animation abilities and interactive possibilities.

Unfortunately, nothing that I know of for the Atari supports swf files, not even Aniplayer. And I don't think there is enough processing power to do it on most Atari machines out there. The only possibility might be if there is a Linux swf viewer that can be ported and run on 060 machines or emulators on fast PC's and Macs. But hey, if anyone wants to prove me wrong, PLEASE DO! I would love to run swf files on my Falcon!"

Well folks, it's short as hell this week, but we're done here. Hopefully there'll be a renewed interest in the UseNet next week and we can look forward to more info and stuff. So tune in again next week, same time, same station, and be ready to listen to what they are saying when...

PEOPLE ARE TALKING

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->In This Week's Gaming Section    - Greek Game Ban Is Overturned!
   "*****"                        New 'Grand Theft Auto' Praised!
                                     PS2 Head-Mount Display!
                                     And more!
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->A-ONE's Game Console Industry News - The Latest Gaming News!  
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Greek Game Ban Overturned

A Greek law banning all electronic games in public has been declared unconstitutional by a court that has dismissed two separate cases against three people charged under the law.

The decision by the Thessaloniki court could eventually see the law repealed, according to reports.

Prior to Tuesday's decision, computer game players and Internet cafes owners in Greece said they would fight against the law. According to the

law's opponents, it was conceived to address illicit gambling but was written so broadly that playing any electronic game could be considered illegal.

Indeed, the three people released Tuesday operated or worked at Internet cafes, and, according to a Greek news Web site, the police officers who searched the cafes testified that they did not observe any Internet gambling going on - just customers playing chess and other non-gambling games over the Internet.

A draft of the bill, which was brought before parliament at the end of May, stated clearly that all games supported by electrical, electromechanical and software means were banned from public places, according to Nikos Kakayanis, managing director of a string of Internet cafes called The Web. A board member of The Web, Christos Iordanidis, was among those facing charges on Tuesday.

When the bill was discussed again in July, said Kakayanis, "a member of the opposition party expressed concern that it would only be a matter of time before the owners of illegal gambling machines moved whatever machines they were using for gambling (coin-ops, PCs, consoles) from their stores in private places." The law was modified to include every private place as well, said Kakayanis.

"Nobody from the members of the parliament realized or could foresee the effects that this would have for PC games, Internet games and game consoles, simply because they are not familiar with that side of technology," he added. The bill became law on 30 July.

"The Greek government banned computer and console games in an attempt to stop illegal gambling," said Kakayanis. "The point is that although the government admitted that it is a tough measure they could not realise that banning computer games and consoles would be a major issue."

The three had faced up to three months imprisonment with a fine of at least 5,000 euros (3,130) each.

Take-Two's 'Grand Theft Auto' Seen as Blockbuster

It's got sunny beaches, scantily-clad women, an all-star 1980s soundtrack and edgy violence -- everything, in fact, except Don Johnson.

A reunion of the popular police show "Miami Vice?"

No, "Grand Theft Auto: Vice City" is a video game and the hotly anticipated follow-up to a controversial title that dominated sales charts for nearly a year and sent publisher, Take-Two Interactive Software Inc. to new heights.

The game's predecessor, "Grand Theft Auto 3," released last October, became a blockbuster and established a formula that gamers loved and critics panned for its reliance on out-of-control car chases and gratuitous violence.

Along the way, the game, for Sony's PlayStation 2 and the PC, sold more than 7 million copies, at an average price of about \$49, for an estimated total near \$350 million.

If the game had been a Hollywood movie, it would have ranked as the seventh-highest grossing film ever, based on domestic box office --- bigger than "Forrest Gump" and just shy of the original "Jurassic Park."

New York-based Take-Two has high hopes that "Vice City," the next installment, will send it into the elite ranks of the \$30 billion-a-year global game publishing business by breaking the earlier game's formidable sales record.

"It clearly has that potential, no question at all," Take-Two Chief Executive Kelly Sumner told Reuters.

On Monday, Take-Two and Sony Music Entertainment, a unit of Sony Corp., which also makes the PlayStation 2, announced a deal to issue seven soundtrack albums based on the in-game radio stations in "Vice City" and featuring artists such as Judas Priest, Blondie and Flock of Seagulls.

"We fully expect it to be the biggest game of the year," said Pete Roithmayr, vice president of games merchandising for retailer Electronics Boutique Holdings Corp. "I would expect it to be an extremely difficult title to find if you don't pre-buy, at least initially."

U.S. Bancorp Piper Jaffray analyst Tony Gikas, in a note to clients last week, estimated that as many as 4 million copies of the game have been pre-ordered and that the game will out-sell its predecessor "GTA 3" by up to 25 percent.

"Now that word of mouth is out there, the initial sales figures are going to be huge," said Dan Hsu, the editor of leading fan magazine Electronic Gaming Monthly. "It's just going to blow away everything at retail."

"GTA 3" has been nothing less than a phenomenon, ranking as the best-selling game in the United States for four months and still regularly selling in the top three.

It has also been roundly criticized in some corners for its blatant violence, including the ability to attack police and old ladies, among others.

Despite some outcry, the franchise shows no sign of abating.

In a conference call with financial analysts last week, Take-Two raised its earnings and revenue guidance for fiscal 2002, ending in October, and the first quarter of fiscal 2003, ending in January, largely on the prospects of "Vice City."

While most video game publishers have seen their stocks fall this year, with just a few trading marginally higher, Take-Two shares have gained 56 percent.

That performance has come in spite of an investigation into the company's accounting practices by the U.S. Securities and Exchange Commission and a halt in the trading of its stock while it restated past results.

Sumner made clear that the game is not just a sequel to "GTA 3," with new locations, new characters and more territory in which to wreak havoc.

Sony to Unveil Head-Mount Display for PS2

Sony will release a head-mount display designed for its PlayStation 2 game console, the company announced Tuesday.

By wearing the product, a user can look around every direction of a game's images and feel as if they were in that virtual space, Sony says in a statement.

The PUD-J5A display carries two 0.44-inch 1.8 million-pixel LCDs attached to over-head type headphones. These displays will give a user a sense of watching a 42-inch screen at a distance of 2 meters, Sony says.

The device can track a user's head movements and display corresponding images when connected to PlayStation 2, Sony says. Game software compatible with the tracking function will be unveiled "soon by some vendors," the company says.

The display can be also connected to the output of DVD players or VCRs for wide-screen viewings.

The headset measures 7.9 inches by 3.9 inches by 9.8 inches when folded, and weighs 12 ounces. Its display part is connected by a cable to the interface box that operates the head-action tracker function. The box measures 2.8 inches by .8 inches by 4.3 inches and weighs 2.8 ounces.

The display will be rolled out on September 26 at \$503 in Japan. The company's online shopping site, PlayStation.Com (Japan) will start taking advance orders for the PUD-J5A on Thursday. Sony does not have a plan to launch the product overseas, according to Mina Naito, a Sony spokesperson.

The company advises children under 15 not to use the product and those who have an eye or a heart disease to consult with a doctor.

Microsoft Mulls Buying Game Developer Rare-Sources

Software giant Microsoft Corp. is considering acquiring U.K. game developer Rare in a bid to jump-start development of its own video games for the Xbox, a source close to the discussions said on Wednesday.

Separately, a source close to Nintendo Co. Ltd., which owns 49 percent of Rare, said the Japanese game and console maker had the opportunity to buy Rare outright and passed, clearing the way for a possible Microsoft acquisition.

The source familiar with the discussions said Microsoft is "definitely looking at (Rare) as an acquisition target." He said Microsoft had approached Rare recently, but said he was unaware of the status of talks.

Calls to Rare were not immediately returned on Wednesday. A spokeswoman for Microsoft declined to comment.

Based in Warwickshire, England, Rare Ltd. is a privately held, 20-year-old development studio best known for its James Bond action game "GoldenEye" and the classic "Donkey Kong Country."

The company has long had an exclusive relationship with Nintendo, which acquired 25 percent of Rare in the 1990s and now owns 49 percent of the company.

Nintendo, however, decided not to buy Rare in large part because of the company's declining contribution to overall software sales, and Nintendo's decision not to commission any further exclusive titles from Rare, the source said.

Sales of Rare games accounted for 9.5 percent of Nintendo's fiscal 2001 total software unit sales, the source said, but only 1.5 percent in fiscal 2002.

For a smaller operation, Rare has developed something of a cult following among avid gamers for developing games with top-of-the-line graphics.

The Rare source said the game studio's reputation plus its ties to Nintendo make it a coveted asset for Microsoft, which needs to build up its library of exclusive Xbox game titles.

"That's their problem," that source said of Microsoft. "They need content. The biggest problem is they don't have the killer (games) that will sell their consoles."

Ever since Microsoft announced its plan to get into the games business and publish its own games, speculation has run rampant on potential acquisition targets. Financial analysts have long expected that the acquisition of games companies by Microsoft was not a question of "if" but "when."

Among the names most recently suggested as potential targets are the games business of struggling Franco-American media giant Vivendi Universal, which is rumored to be on the block for as much as \$2 billion and Japanese publisher Sega Corp.

Microsoft has denied comment on all such reports. Vivendi Universal has been tight-lipped about its games plans, while Sega has flatly denied that it is on the block.

While the Xbox is holding its own in the marketplace, it has had only one break-out hit of its own design, the military action game "Halo."

Successful games are crucial to console makers, who tend to sustain sometimes-steep losses on their hardware, which they make up through healthy profit margins on software sales.

Microsoft, for example, is believed to be losing anywhere from \$76 to \$150 on each Xbox, which retails in the United States for \$199.

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Internet Becomes Global Shrine to September 11 Dead

The Internet became a globe-spanning memorial Wednesday, with condolences, poems, reflections, artwork and photos pouring onto the World Wide Web to commemorate the first anniversary of the Sept. 11 attacks that killed more than 3,000 people in the United States.

In every conceivable online forum, Net users paid tribute to firefighters and police officers. They prayed for the victims' families. They reflected on the prospects of world peace. They shared their memories, hopes and fears.

"Our spirit unites us. Our hope makes us strong," read a message from a Turkish man on one of the scores of discussion boards dedicated to reflections on the meaning of the day one year after hijacked commercial airliners slammed into the World Trade Center, the Pentagon and a Pennsylvania field.

Similarly poignant messages filtered in from the Far East to Manhattan's Lower East Side.

As the tragedy unfolded a year ago, millions took to the Net to express their grief and anger. The outpouring of emotion in those first numbing hours seemed almost to give the medium a heart.

One year later, individuals and businesses turned to the Net to do what it does best -- connect people from all over the world instantaneously.

Close to 30,000 sites dedicated to the event were created between Sept. 11 and Dec. 1, according to Pew Internet & American Life Project.

One site trying to preserve the digital history of the attacks is <http://www.911digitalarchive.org>, a project run by the American Social History Project and the Center for Media and Learning at the City of University New York.

"Sept. 11 was the first fully digital event in world history," said Fritz Umbrach, a historian at City University of New York working on the project.

"If historians are going to fully understand the public response to 9-11, we need to collect this new digital material, especially as the personal computer becomes the primary communication method for the U.S.

"About 100 million people sent e-mail in days and weeks after attacks," he continued. "It's the best record of people's immediate response." Wednesday, the commercial aspect of the medium was muted.

Amazon.com, the world's largest online retailer, did a makeover of its home page, displaying artwork and poems taken from the book, "Messages to Ground Zero: Children Respond to September 11, 2001," instead of offering the latest in DVDs, books and music.

The page featured sketches from New York area students depicting candles, upraised hands, and construction crews tending to Ground Zero in lower Manhattan, site of the World Trade Center's twin towers, which collapsed after the hijackers crashed their seized planes into them.

At the bottom of the page there is a scanned-in letter from a schoolgirl, Cadence.

"Dear Fireman," reads the letter dated Sept. 17. "My name is Cadence. I'm missing an uncle. please find him. His name is Gonja. His family misses him ... he was the Best uncle in the world. I feel like crying."

Proceeds from the book will go to the Fund for the Public Schools, NYC. Donations are earmarked specifically to benefit children who lost a parent in the September 11 tragedy or were forced to evacuate their schools.

Web portals Yahoo.com Lycos.com shaded their home pages, which attract millions of users every day, in gray and black, respectively, and donated space normally dedicated to top-paying advertisers to the cause.

On the top of Yahoo.com, where it typically promotes the latest movies and music, Yahoo asked visitors to create and share a memorial tile. Thousands had been posted from all over the world.

"Ignorance and intolerance perpetuate hate," wrote one user from the Netherlands, accompanying his words with an image of the Earth with "peace" spelled out in multiple languages.

This being the Web, where the anonymity of message posting makes it a popular forum to express dissent, a number of users continued to air their criticisms of the handling of the Middle East crisis and a possible U.S.-led invasion on Iraq.

"Bush will give us war whether we want it or not," one posting on the discussion group alt.politics read.

Others chose to point out that a series of security alerts had been issued for the day, commenting that this would become an increasingly common occurrence.

But a large majority have joined a Spanish user in sending a message of hope.

"Just a wish of Peace for all the victims, Victims of attacks in the US, of attacks in Asia, Palestine or any other land where violent people try to destroy Peace and Love. We are all the same and all we come from God. Peace."

Microsoft Offers Major Update to Windows XP

Microsoft Corp. released a software update for its flagship computer operating system on Monday to make Windows XP more secure, reliable and open to modification.

Service Pack 1, Microsoft's first major update to Windows XP since the launch of its "trustworthy computing" initiative and consent decree with the U.S. Justice Department, is now available on the software giant's Web site or on a CD that can be ordered for \$9.95.

Users who signed up for automatic updates to their Windows XP operating system, which went on sale nearly a year ago, will be able to download the 32-megabyte chunk of software starting on Monday afternoon.

One the most striking changes will be the ability to remove Microsoft's default programs, such as Internet Explorer or Windows Media Player, from the desktop altogether.

Those changes, enabled by the software update, are part of Microsoft's steps to comply with the antitrust settlement signed with the U.S. Justice Department last year, said Jim Cullinan, lead product manager for Windows XP.

The settlement must still be approved by a federal judge and is still opposed by nine states seeking stiffer sanctions.

The other major feature of Service Pack 1 is a range of features meant to enhance security, which has become a crucial effort for Microsoft.

One security feature is better management of cookies, or little snippets of information that Web site servers store on PCs, that gives users greater control of their information and privacy.

Shaken by break-ins to its own system and vulnerabilities in its software, Chairman Bill Gates sent a widely-publicized memo earlier this year stressing the need for Microsoft to boost security and make its software more trustworthy.

Many corporations have been slow to adopt Windows XP, partly because it is still new and requires a substantial investment during cash-strapped times and also because of security concerns.

"We hope the Service Pack will be a catalyst for IT managers to look at Windows XP again," Cullinan said.

While previous versions of Windows XP -- some 46 million were sold by the end of June -- will require Service Pack 1, the update will be bundled into future products from about mid-October, Microsoft said.

This is also the first Service Pack for consumers -- previous updates were mainly for corporate Windows operating systems.

In addition to the major security and program updates, the software update will pack in some new features as well.

Java Virtual Machine, for which downloads on demand were previously not available, will be included in the update. But, because of a settlement reached with Sun Microsystems Inc. , which developed and markets Java, the programming language will no longer be included in Windows after 2004.

On the hardware side, the Service Pack adds support for USB 2.0, a new standard for universal serial bus peripherals that offers data transfer speeds up to 40 times faster.

Also, the Service Pack will add functionality to the Windows XP operating system for Windows XP Media Center, which PC hardware makers will use to introduce PC-based TV, music and video entertainment systems this fall.

Some users have raised complaints about the language in the Service Pack's end-user license agreement, or EULA, which they claim gives Microsoft some rights to check product versions and block some programs. Microsoft said that the Service Packs' EULA clarifies Microsoft's ability to check product information in order to provide accurate updates and that no personal information is taken or kept.

Microsoft's Next Must-Have Operating System

Its code name is "Longhorn," and for many industry-watchers, Microsoft's next major operating system release promises some dramatic changes in the way information is organized, retrieved and displayed.

Microsoft already has made a significant commitment to production of the OS. Company chairman Bill Gates told analysts in July that the company will increase its 2003 RD5.2 billion and will hire 5,000 employees to prepare for a series of software launches that includes Longhorn.

Gates also explained that the upcoming release will "promise the greatest breakthroughs to date for information workers" in terms of how applications, operating systems and Web services will be more tightly integrated to better organize and display data.

"As we continue to move into the 'Digital Decade,' we're seeing the boundaries between systems and applications start to dissolve," he said.

Details of what Longhorn will actually be like are still unclear, as rumors spread on message boards and in chat rooms about how the operating system will function.

At least one report has indicated that Longhorn will use a new application programming interface (API) framework, code-named Avalon, as the core of its new information access architecture. The structure is intended to let users share and organize information in a more intuitive way than in previous versions of Windows.

The platform, according to reports, also is designed to tie into a .NET environment.

Microsoft spokespersons told NewsFactor that it is far too early to comment on any specific features of the upcoming OS, or on its projected release date.

But some analysts have questioned whether commercial clients, as well as many consumers, still regard operating systems as software that needs to be upgraded.

"I believe [operating systems] are viewed as a feature of the hardware, and I think [they are] becoming less important over time, rather than more," Carl Howe, research director at Forrester, told NewsFactor. "The days of do-it-yourself are ending. People want things that will provide some immediate satisfaction and that do something they need."

And IDC director of client computing Roger Kay told NewsFactor: "I think consumers don't care about new features. They still haven't figured out all the features on the last [operating system]."

Microsoft disagreed. Its spokesperson said the software maker is encouraged by sales of Windows XP as an indicator of how Longhorn may fare.

"Microsoft has not seen evidence of consumers tiring of OS upgrades," said the spokesperson, pointing out that more than 46 million copies of Windows XP have been sold through OEMs and retail outlets since the software's

release in October 2001.

The company said its statistics show that XP, which launched to what industry reports called flat-to-modest sales, has outpaced all other operating systems that Microsoft has released. That tally includes Windows 98 (news - web sites), which had sold 28.5 million copies after the first nine months.

Microsoft said it could not provide a breakdown between XP copies sold to OEMs and to retail outlets.

What it would take to make consumers crave a new Windows operating system, according to analysts, has less to do with particular features than with how reliable and easy to use such an OS would be.

In terms of the ability to take advantage of Web services features, IDC's Kay predicted that consumers will be unwilling to upgrade to Longhorn just so they can make "a dentist appointment via their dentist's Web site from their own PC."

"If they find out that in order to get that marginal feature they have to get a whole new OS and maybe a whole new PC, it will be one angry bunch of consumers," Kay added.

Instead, Kay said, Microsoft must de-emphasize features and instead provide a less expensive, bugless OS.

"They almost never take away an editing feature," said Forrester's Howe. "And the problem with that is that the user gets overwhelmed."

And in light of Apple's "Switch" campaign ads, which tout how the company's new Jaguar operating system does not crash, avoiding system lock-ups is a critical point for Microsoft consumers, Julie Giera, IT Services vice president and research leader at Giga Information Group, told NewsFactor.

"They don't need all this fancy stuff. They need to be able to get to the Web, not blow up and get the blue screen of death," Giera said.

For companies whose business relies on Windows, many of which have just signed on to a new Microsoft licensing program that charges regular fees to companies in exchange for the ability to upgrade, the introduction of a new operating system is a different story.

"They will spend the next year-and-a-half going through the upgrades of what they've bought -- XP and all the other products," said Giera. "When Longhorn comes about, I don't think we're going to find companies willing to jump back into an upgrade cycle."

Yet, if companies do consider an upgrade, Giera noted that a few requisite items are on executives' lists of OS requirements. They include: ease of maintenance and support; solid security, especially with the advent of Web services; decreased software cost; and potentially even the choice of a stripped-down version of the OS.

But Giera added that Longhorn's success may be most reliant upon how well .NET is received among Microsoft customers. The fact that such companies as IBM have supported .NET should aid in its acceptance.

"[Microsoft] has got to have a good, strong underpinning for .NET, and make it clear how all the pieces fit together with .NET and how they're going to

help the customer," she said.

New Devices Plug the Gap Between Floppy and CD

Remember that floppy disk you used to transport and back up data?

If you're like most heavy computer users, your spreadsheets, presentations, MP3 and digital photo files are way too big to fit on a floppy anymore. Many computers, such as Apple's Macintosh line and notebooks from IBM and Dell, no longer even have floppy drives.

With 650 megabytes of storage space -- enough for oodles of data -- and prices well under \$1 each, blank CDs have replaced the floppy as a cost-effective solution for many users. But Sony, Lexar Media, SanDisk and several other manufacturers have an answer for those who may not have access to a CD burner or the time to learn to use software to record a CD.

No generic name has come up yet for these finger-size cordless devices that simply plug into the USB ports of just about any PC or Mac. Sony's version is the Micro Vault. Lexar's is the Jump Drive, and SanDisk's is the Cruzer.

They generally have 64 or 128 megabytes of storage -- much less than a CD, but the equivalent of 45 to 90 floppies -- and they cost \$60 to \$130. "Floppies are history," Lexar's David Klenske says. "They don't have the capacity for today's files."

The 128MB Lexar Jump Drive holds about 200 high-resolution images, or 20 to 25 songs, Klenske says.

Sony was the first major manufacturer to unveil the product line, in January. "While we're not in the millions yet, we're looking at a growth rate of about 1,000%," Sony's Tom Evans says. "It's one of the fastest-growing new technologies we've ever introduced."

* Users of Microsoft Windows operating systems from ME to XP or Apple Macintosh OS 9 though OS X get plug-and-play functionality, without any extra software needed. For users of Windows 98, the manufacturers offer driver downloads on their Web sites.

* Plug the unit into your USB port; it will show up as an external drive on your computer. There is no need to use an external USB cord or a plug into the wall; the computer provides the drive's power.

* Drag and drop files onto the external-drive icon until you fill the device.

* Repeat the process, and move the files to the other computer.

These drives are "small and a neat device to take data around," analyst Dave Reinsel of the market research group IDC says. "There's even talk about them becoming like personal IDs to our computers -- keys to turn them on -- which would be an excellent way to provide security to your machine."

Lexar plays up the education aspect: Instead of hauling around boxes of floppy discs, students can hang the drive on their key chains, enter data

in class and bring it to their home computer, whether they're working on a PC, Mac or both, because the devices are cross-platform.

The units use flash memory, the same type used in digital cameras and MP3 players. Prices of memory have fallen over the past year by almost 40%, enabling makers such as Lexar and Sony to offer such small products at affordable prices.

"Before, it would have been prohibitively expensive," says Craig McHugh, president of Creative Labs. The company has introduced the Nomad MuVo, which it has positioned as a tiny combination MP3 music player and data-transfer tool.

For now, blank CDs are the dominant form of external storage. The Consumer Electronics Association projects that 1.6 billion blank discs will be shipped to U.S. stores in 2002. Floppy manufacturer Imation estimates that 720 million floppy disks will be shipped this year.

The company says that even in the face of floppy-less computers, its business is doing just fine. "We're having one of the best years in the company's history, our factory is running at full capacity, and we expect sales to remain strong," Imation's Mike Noer says.

Though Imation sells "slightly more" blank CDs than diskettes, "it's pretty close," Noer says. He says he doesn't see the floppy going away "because too many people have drives in their computers."

Reinsel says that before USB drives can become the dominant media for storage, their prices have to drop. "Compared to hard drives, they're way too expensive." A Maxtor 40GB drive, which holds more than 300 times as much as the tiny USB drives, costs only \$140, though most users probably wouldn't carry it around. The portable Apple iPod MP3 player, which also can be used for data storage, holds 5 GB for \$299.

Radu Andrei of Web-Feet Research predicts the USB drives will fall in price by at least 50% within 12 months. "That's been the trend for products like this," he says. "When something comes out, you first perceive it as expensive, and then, in no time, the price drops rapidly."

Web Accelerators - Speed Without Broadband

Overblown promises of speedier Web connections have yielded mixed results on the Internet. But a new class of products offers accelerated Internet browsing for consumers looking for higher speed without paying a high price.

Such Web performance enhancements are being offered to individual consumers by services such as Propel Accelerator for personal computers, BlueKite in mobile computers and Bitstream's ThunderHawk for handheld computers and eventually mobile phones.

Accelerator products or services share some methods, while differing in others. Propel Accelerator claims to use at least 100 technical tricks to achieve speeds of two-and-one-half to five times faster than standard dial-up.

Other tools work to compress software code, graphics, advertisements, even

typefaces, many times over. Companies often install so-called proxy servers at strategic points around the Internet to accelerate their customers' traffic.

But these products and services are not for everyone.

The best way to boost personal computer speeds is still to pay for broadband modem links over cable television lines or digital subscriber line (DSL) high-speed phone lines. DSL is typically 10 to 25 times faster than dial-up access over standard phone lines. Cable modems run 20 to 100 times faster.

For mobile computers, the best way to assure a speedy connection is to pay for the latest generation of wireless network access.

"DSL (high-speed phone service) is superior. No question. We don't accelerate MP3s, streaming (digital music, audio and video), etc. But most of America just wants to surf," a spokeswoman for Propel Software Corp. said.

But for those users unwilling to pay the hefty prices for broadband Internet service starting in the range of \$40 or \$50 or price-tags for next-generation mobile phone service that go as high as \$100 per month, browser accelerators may be an answer.

Furthermore, accelerator software in some cases can be used to speed up broadband connections, in answer to the unquenchable thirst for faster Internet access.

Such compression works by updating only new information, not entire Web pages. In Propel's case, Web pages and Web-based e-mail delivery is accelerated but the system does little to improve the pace of other types of e-mail or downloaded data.

To be sure, major Internet companies such as America Online have built such technologies -- specifically, datastream compression tricks -- into their networks for seven years or more, an AOL spokesman says.

Akamai has built a network of accelerator computers at strategic points around the Internet and offers such services indirectly to consumers by helping major Web sites speed Web page delivery to their users.

Web accelerators such as Propel must also battle claims made by some unscrupulous product promoters who promise huge increases in speed when, in effect, all they do is modify simple computer settings, the computer equivalent of sleight of hand.

Such fraudulent offers, which fill many consumer e-mail in-boxes these days, go back to the PC memory-doubling claims that the U.S. Federal Trade Commission has been tracking since it cracked down on Synchronous Softcorp in 1996.

"All the snake oil salesman on the Internet make life difficult for us," Propel Software founder Steve Kirsch said. "We want to tell people that Propel increases speeds by two-and-a-half to five times," he said.

"But if we say that our products work too well, no one believes us because of all the overblown claims," Kirsch said. He sums up his company's dilemma: "If we downplay the speed advantages, no one wants to buy the product."

Propel, of San Jose, California, has been downloaded by about 25,000 customers since it launched its service this spring, said Kirsch, who is best known as co-founder and former CEO of Internet search pioneer Infoseek.

Propel's advertising boasts speeds of four to nine times faster on popular Web sites such as auction site eBay, online newspaper USA Today and broadcaster CNN. Monthly charges run \$4.95, with an introductory price of \$49.95 a year.

Artera Group Inc. of Middlebury, Connecticut, describes what it calls its "Download Doubler" technology that takes a single download request and divides it to run two simultaneous requests for half of each file or graphic.

Artera boasts it can speed a dial-up Web connection by up to 50 percent and improve data download speeds by 20 percent at a price of \$10 per month. It makes similar claims for DSL and cable modem connections. Artera claims it can speed dial-up Web links by 150 percent when the user hooks up two dial-up lines.

But there's a catch: "For optimal performance, the residential dial-up versions require 2 phone lines, 2 ISP accounts and 2 modems," Artera's Web site reads.

Broadband connections may prove more economical at that point.

The emerging market for handheld computers with wireless connections is fertile ground for such speed enhancements.

BlueKite Inc. of San Francisco says it optimizes wireless Internet connections to speeds equivalent to, or better than, a 56 kilobit per second connection, the speed of typical U.S. residential Internet access. That's an increase in browsing speeds of three to five times most other wireless connections.

Bitstream Inc.'s ThunderHawk offers faster speeds for handheld computer users now, and for the new generation of Internet-friendly mobile phones that will be arriving on the market over the next year. ThunderHawk runs on Compaq iPaqs, Toshiba and other handheld computers and smartphones.

Instead of focusing on speed, Bitstream emphasizes how it improves the amount of data it can fit on small computer screens. This builds on Bitstream's 20-year expertise in font-rendering, or drawing fonts on computer screens.

"Our expertise in font technology has a lot to do with our ability to bring this product to market," said Bitstream President and Chief Operating Officer Anna Chagnon. "It gives users four times more 'screen real estate' than a standard mobile browser," she said of the company's new product push.

For the technically intrepid, the Internet offers reams of free advice on tweaking your computer to speed Web-page performance, from turning off data-intensive graphics to more complicated fiddling with network settings. But such tricks can backfire and make computers unstable, if not unusable.

Intel promotes perhaps the best performance enhancement of all. Buy a new PC, with a faster processor, and hook yourself up to a high-speed Internet connection, as tens of millions of Internet users have already done.

Domain Firm Sets Rules for Children Internet Zone

Sex, violence and the "seven dirty words" prohibited by the U.S. Federal Communications Commission would be banned from a children's Internet domain, according to preliminary guidelines released on Monday by the domain manager.

Washington-based NeuStar Inc., which plans to set up the kid-friendly Internet zone, said it would rely on existing guidelines for television and advertising to determine what material would be appropriate for the ".kids.us" domain.

Developers would have to follow FCC rules for radio and television, which bar profanity and require some educational content, the privately held company said, while advertisements would have to comply with guidelines set up by a Better Business Bureau panel.

Illegal drug use, alcohol or tobacco use, gambling and skimpy clothing also would be prohibited, the company said. Exceptions could be made if the material had educational, literary or scientific merit, the company said.

While explicit violence and weapons use would be prohibited, determining exactly where to draw the line could be problematic, NeuStar said.

"We invite commenters to suggest means of defining a bright-line test for determining when violent content, or any other inappropriate content, might be inappropriate for a 12-year-old," the company said in comments published on its Web site.

The company, which also manages the new ".biz" domain, said it was seeking public input until October 11.

Congress has for years tried to prevent children from being exposed to pornography, hate speech and other "adult" content on the Internet.

After several attempts to ban content outright were struck down by the courts, lawmakers have proposed setting up a kids-only area within the United States' ".us" domain.

The House of Representatives passed the bill in May, and a similar version has been introduced in the Senate.

PayPal Hit With Patent Infringement Lawsuit

Online payment vendor PayPal is being sued for allegedly infringing on business process patents owned by First USA Bank NA.

In a lawsuit filed last Friday in U.S. District Court in Delaware, First USA alleged that Mountain View, California-based PayPal is using online transaction technologies that are already patented by Wilmington, Delaware-based First USA.

In its complaint, First USA said PayPal's use of its "cardless payment

system" processes infringe on the patents because PayPal allows customers to make or collect online payments without having to enter their confidential bank account or credit card information each time. That mechanism, which uses a database to securely store user account information so it doesn't have to be entered each time, instead uses a personal identification number or other identification marker, under two patents First USA said it holds.

The patents were issued to inventor Kurt M. Campisano in May 2001 and January 2002, according to the complaint. First USA is the assignee of the patents.

A spokesman for First USA, which is the credit card arm of Bank One in Chicago, had no comment today on the lawsuit. First USA has 53 million cardholders and is the third-largest credit card company in the United States.

Vince Sollitto, a spokesman for PayPal, said his company "does not believe we infringed on the patents."

"The suit is without merit," he said. "We will defend ourselves vigorously." The two-count suit asks for unspecified monetary damages and asks that PayPal be permanently barred from using the transaction processes that allegedly infringe on the First USA patents.

PayPal, which began operations in 1999, provides a way for online buyers and sellers to make secure transfers of money worldwide. The company serves online auctions such as San Jose-based eBay, which purchased PayPal last July in a deal worth about \$1.5 billion.

AltaVista Joins Google in 'China Block' Club

On the heels of its blockage of Google earlier last week, the Chinese government apparently has restricted access to a second search engine, U.S.-based AltaVista.

Officials at AltaVista would not confirm whether their search engine is being blocked, but they did say the usual traffic from China has vanished. "It could be traffic congestion," AltaVista chief marketing officer Fred Bullock told NewsFactor.

Although Bullock estimated that Chinese Web surfers represent less than 5 percent of AltaVista's users, he said the company views China as an important market because of its tremendous growth potential.

Yankee Group senior analyst Aditya Puri told NewsFactor that with some 34 million users, representing just 3 percent of the country's total population, the Chinese Internet market is among the most significant in the world.

Meanwhile, Gartner research director French Caldwell put the number of Chinese Internet users at 46 million, calling China second only to the United States in terms of market size.

Bullock said AltaVista does not have an agreement with the Chinese government regarding the Web sites listed by its search engine, which uses U.S.-based servers and delivers the same results to users regardless of

their location.

"We're basically a pipeline between people and information, especially in countries not as developed as much as we're used to in the Western world," he noted.

According to analysts, the blockage is probably occurring because search engines like Google and AltaVista can serve as work-arounds for users trying to access sites blocked by the Chinese government. They also noted that increased censorship in China is common when political events loom, such as the pending Communist Party convention, scheduled for November.

Both Google and AltaVista said they are working with Chinese officials to restore access to their sites, a process that analysts said will likely involve curtailing search results to meet Chinese censorship requirements.

"We have actively been in contact with the Chinese government to get information regarding blocking access to our site," Bullock said. "We're definitely interested in having a dialogue with the Chinese government in understanding, short-term, what is the issue with providing access."

In the meantime, AltaVista chief technical officer Doug Young told NewsFactor that the company is setting up an alternate URL -- www.raging.com -- that will be accessible in China and will deliver "search results identical to the main site."

RIAA Seeks Swift Ruling Against File Swappers

Apparently tired of legal dillydallying, groups representing the music and motion picture industries filed a motion to a federal court requesting a swift ruling against peer-to-peer file swapping services Kazaa, Morpheus, and Grokster Monday, calling their networks "candy stores of infringement."

The motion was filed by the Recording Industry Association of America, the Motion Picture Association of America, and the National Music Publishers Association in a Los Angeles federal court, following months of drawn out litigation against the P-to-P services.

The music and motion picture industries initially sued the services last October, claiming that they knowingly allow users to pirate their copyright-protected works. The groups took the same stand against Napster and succeeded in getting a court to permanently knock the file swapping site offline.

Their case against the new generation of P-to-P networks has hit a snag, however, in that the services claim that, unlike Napster, they have no central servers and cannot control what their users do.

However, the groups released a statement on the motion saying that the services control the networks "in a way that could easily prevent copyright infringement from occurring." They cite an instance earlier this year when Kazaa turned off fellow P-to-P service Morpheus.

Furthermore, the groups allege that the services designed their businesses to exploit the value of their copyright works.

"This is Cybernetic shoplifting. The defendants have used the Internet to

enrich themselves and deprive creators and copyright holders of their right to be compensated for their works, thereby perpetuating the mentality that stealing is an acceptable form of behavior," says Mark Litvack, MPAA Vice President and Director of Legal Affairs in a statement released this week.

On the same day the industry groups requested a speedy ruling against the P-to-P networks, Morpheus petitioned the court for a summary judgment declaring its legality. Morpheus contends that its software has substantial non-infringing uses and should be protected.

It remains to be seen how the dueling motions fare, as the court weighs the case in following weeks.

The music and motion picture groups said that their brief has been sealed, in response to confidential evidence submitted by the defendants, so no further details were available.

None of the P-to-P services named in the case were immediately available for comment Tuesday.

Morpheus Issues Its Own Legal Challenge

Lawyers for StreamCast Networks, the company behind the popular peer-to-peer software Morpheus, have asked a Los Angeles federal court to rule that the distribution of the software does not violate copyright law, the Electronic Frontier Foundation said Monday.

StreamCast Networks' request comes on the heels of a lawsuit filed against the company by twenty-eight major entertainment companies which claim that Morpheus allows users to pirate their content.

In the company's motion for a summary judgment, StreamCast asked the court to approve the legal distribution of Morpheus, saying that the software is capable of substantial non-infringing uses. Furthermore, StreamCast said that it cannot control the actions of its users, the EFF said.

The San Francisco-based civil liberties group is helping represent the Franklin, Tennessee, company in its case, and said that additional briefs will be filed in coming months and oral arguments are set for December 2, 2002.

Morpheus is not alone in its fight to be deemed legitimate, as P-to-P services Grokster and Kazaa are also fighting lawsuits over copyright infringement.

While the services claim that they have no control over their users' actions, that argument did not go far for now-defunct Napster.

However, the fact that the new generation of P-to-P services have no central servers sets them apart from Napster and may aid them in their battle because they can claim that they have no control over what files are swapped.

Napster's Legacy Lives On

Here lieth Napster: Net renegade, consumer advocate, corporate ire inducer, and theft enabler.

Although Napster's prolonged death rumble finally came to its last gasping breath this week when a judge blocked the sale of its assets to German media giant Bertelsmann, the little kitty that could hasn't really gone through all nine lives, has it?

Despite the fact that users looking to pay their last respects to the song swapping site that started it all found a "Ded Kitty" caption on Napster's Web site earlier this week, emblazoned above the company's familiar cat-in-headphones logo, it at least lives on through the legacy it created.

While Napster's free-trading ways were eventually tamed by the record industry, when they had the peer-to-peer site knocked permanently offline last year, the file swapping networks that have arisen in its wake are even more formidable.

"Napster may be gone but the legacy that it left behind was millions of users who were exposed to the concept of P-to-P networks," says Michael Gartenberg, research director at Jupiter Research. "The genie is out of the bottle."

Napster, which claimed over 60 million users at its height, was run from central servers, making it relatively easy to shut down. However, the newfangled P-to-P networks that have arrived in its place, such as Morpheus and Kazaa, have no central servers, with files located only on users' computers. And not only are these networks tougher to curtail, they are wildly popular and allow for easy trading of not just MP3s, but movies, videos, and entire CD box sets.

No wonder the music industry has launched a fierce retaliatory campaign, firing off lawsuits while sending in armies of lobbyists and legislative foot soldiers in an attempt to thwart piracy.

Aside from copyright infringement suits against the P-to-P networks, the music industry has been lobbying in Washington for copyright-protection controls in electronic consumer devices and other protective measures.

But while groups like the Recording Industry Association of America (news - web sites) and the Motion Picture Association of America have rolled out the big guns, the free file-swappers are clearly not ready for a retreat.

Kazaa home users totalled 8.2 million in June, according to research from ComScore Media Metrix, while P-to-P software application Audiogalaxy had 3.2 million users that same month and Morpheus 2.9 million.

What's more, the RIAA's recent attempts to track down individual, infringing file swappers, have apparently boiled the blood of some tech-savvy swappers, who not only hacked the RIAA's site, but posted free music downloads on it.

"The hacking crowd is not a group of people you want to pick a fight with," Gartenberg says. "If the game here is going to be a technical cat and mouse, the recording industry is doomed to failure."

Gartenberg predicts that the recording industry is in for an uphill battle unless it can make some serious concessions on music pricing and

portability.

"Right now we can have any song we want by any artist we want for free and the response to the record industry is what are you countering that with?" he says.

While major-label backed online music subscription services are beginning to ease their rigid hold on music by offering consumers features such as CD burning, the industry is not prepared to give up the ship yet, despite the tenacity of the pirates.

Speaking on the introduction of new anti-piracy legislation last July, RIAA Chairman Hilary Rosen said, "the current landscape for online music is dangerously one-sided, with peer-to-peer pirates enjoying an unfair advantage."

With the popularity of P-to-P networks on the rise, it might be some time before the music industry regains ground. Still, the demise of Napster, once the emblem of tech rebel hipness, serves as a stark reminder of assailability of things that appear too good to be true.

And while Napster's cold remains are now for sale in bankruptcy liquidation, and up for grabs to anyone who can scrape together the \$6 million minimum bid, the battle it sparked appears far from over.

Given this, perhaps Napster's best eulogy is the one it wrote itself, appearing now on www.napster.com: "Napster was here."

What's the Value of Old Software?

What do you do with a warehouse full of outdated software? Simple--put it up for auction online with a starting bid of \$250,000.

At least, that's what Eli Tomlinson plans to do. Beginning September 7, Tomlinson is offering some 250,000 software titles--more than half of them released before 1990--in a single EBay auction.

Tomlinson, now assistant vice president of information systems for a bank in Homestead, Pennsylvania, acquired the software over the past 20 years in his roles as a computer programmer, software publisher-importer, owner of a close-out software business, and computer hobbyist.

Nearly 80 percent of the 250,000-piece collection consists of gaming titles, including a nearly complete line of games from such publishers as Accolade, Activision, Epyx, Infocom, LucasArts, Microprose, Origin Systems, Taito, and Virgin, according to Tomlinson. The games were designed for a variety of now-vintage home computers and operating systems, including Apple II, Amiga, Atari, Commodore 64, CP/M, Macs, and PCs. Over 60 percent of the collection has never been used and is in its original packaging, or as they say on EBay, MIB (Mint In Box).

Given today's sophisticated computer games, with their cinematic imagery, CD-quality sound, and nonstop, in-your-face action, would anyone really want, say, a copy of Text Adventures, an early-1980s puzzle game that--as its name implies--relies entirely on text?

Absolutely, says Tomlinson. In every field of interest, collectors

invariably emerge, and home computer software is no different. The personal computer revolution began in the mid-1970s--a time now distant enough for early programs to arouse interest today as baby-boomer nostalgia.

In addition, first runs of popular game titles in the late 1970s and early 1980s typically consisted of only 2500 to 5000 copies, even from major publishers, according to Tomlinson. The result: Vintage gaming software, particularly titles still in their original box, is "remarkably rare" compared to other collectibles, such as baseball cards.

Finally, the growing popularity of EBay and other auction sites has made it possible for buyers to easily find sellers of collectible software, and vice versa.

"Interest in collectible software is growing," Tomlinson asserts. As evidence, he cites some of his own recent vintage software auctions on EBay: Leisure Suit Larry sold for \$122.50; Zork 1 went for \$71; and Welltris was snatched up for \$62.50.

Not surprisingly, interest in vintage computers appears to be rising as well. Last fall, for instance, an Altair 8800, one of the most sought-after collectible computers, sold on EBay for \$1967 and change. The computer's original price in 1975: about \$500.

Meanwhile, Web sites devoted to classic computer games and other software titles abound. Among the vintage game-related sites are Mobygames.com, Classicgamer.com, and Classicgaming.com.

Old Software sells exactly what its name implies, as well as vintage hardware (such as a used Commodore 64 computer for \$90). You can also easily find vintage software programs on the Web available for free download. For instance, the groundbreaking spreadsheet application VisiCalc, released in 1981 for the IBM PC, is available at Dan Bricklin's Web site at no charge. A Google search for a vintage software title often leads to FTP and other sites where the program can be downloaded.

Tomlinson's auction is aimed at entrepreneurs looking to resell individual titles to collectors. The auction includes a Microsoft Access database that Tomlinson created, cataloging 16,000 software titles, including images, original release dates, keywords, and other information.

Selling closeout and vintage software is a viable business, Tomlinson says. For example, if you buy 10,000 pieces of software for \$1 apiece, you'll break even just by selling only 1000 pieces at \$10 each--and that's easy to do, he explains. Tomlinson says he's auctioning the software off in one lump because he wants to sell the downtown Scranton warehouse in which the collection is stored.

To get more details about Tomlinson's auction, which ends September 17, go to his Web site.

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